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Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The report covers key developments relating to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since my previous report, which was issued on 19 October 2017 (S/2017/881), and the briefing of my Special Representative for Iraq to the Council on 22 November 2017.

II. Summary of key political developments pertaining to Iraq

A. Political situation

2. On 9 December 2017, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, declared final victory over Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The following day was declared an official holiday and a military parade was held in Baghdad to mark the victory. Mr. Al-Abadi said that Iraqi security forces had cleared out the remaining ISIL strongholds and raised the Iraqi flag in the western areas of Anbar Governorate, which had been the last remaining territory under the group's control. The flag flew high over all of Iraq and in most remote border areas, he said. He congratulated the Iraqi people and expressed gratitude to the families of those killed in action. He said that Iraq would continue to better the lives of its citizens, with respect for the religious, ethnic and ideological diversity of the country.

3. Mr. Al-Abadi said that the Iraqis had prevailed over terror through their unity, which should be strengthened by every means possible. He urged all politicians to refrain from inflammatory or sectarian speech, which had been a major cause of the emergence of ISIL. He emphasized that Iraq was for all Iraqis and that everyone was entitled to reap the benefits of security, stability, reconstruction and economic prosperity. The Government would endeavour to rebuild all cities in the liberated areas and southern governorates.

4. Mr. Al-Abadi saluted the members of all branches of the Iraqi security forces, including the army, police, air force, intelligence services, counter-terrorism services and popular mobilization forces, and also later mentioned the Peshmerga. He lauded the "historic fatwa" issued by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, which had resulted in

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the largest-ever voluntary campaign in support of the armed forces, transforming the fight against terrorism into an all-out national battle. Mr. Al-Abadi praised the tribal fighters and inhabitants of the territory occupied by ISIL who had cooperated with the security forces to liberate their lands and expressed gratitude to the countries and humanitarian organizations that had stood by Iraq.

5. Mr. Al-Abadi underlined the need for vigilance and preparedness to confront terrorist activity targeting the people or the country. He labelled terrorism a permanent enemy, underscoring that the battle must continue. He also said that the fight against corruption was a natural extension of the liberation operations and another battle in which everyone should participate.

6. The victory announcement was welcomed by Iraqi leaders, who emphasized the need for the reconstruction of the liberated areas, the return of displaced persons, measures to counter extremist ideologies and national reconciliation. It was also hailed by the representative of Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani, Ayatollah Abdul Mahdi al-Karbala'i, who nevertheless said in his sermon on 15 December that victory did not mean the end of the fight against terrorism. He called for efforts to address the intellectual and religious roots of terrorism, improve living conditions in the liberated areas and enable the dignified return of displaced persons. He stressed that the erosion of constitutional rights and a repetition of past mistakes should be avoided.

7. Ayatollah Karbala'i said that the Iraqi security system still needed many of the volunteers from the popular mobilization forces, who should continue to participate in the maintenance of security within the constitutional and legal frameworks that confined the use of arms to the State. The Government should provide a decent living for the families of those who had been killed and wounded in combat. He warned against exploiting the good reputation of the popular mobilization forces for political ends and emphasized the importance of a serious and effective effort to confront corruption.

8. Ayatollah Karbala'i's statement was preceded by statements from various factions of the popular mobilization forces. On 11 December, Muqtada al-Sadr stated that the Peace Brigades would be transformed into a civil organization and called upon the group's members to hand liberated areas over to the Iraqi security forces within 45 days. On 13 December, the Secretary-General of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Qais al-Khaz'ali, announced that his group would become a political entity and sever ties with its fighters, who had been transferred to the popular mobilization forces. Both men were adamant that members of the popular mobilization forces could not participate in the political process. The Secretary-General of the Badr Organization, Hadi al-Amiri, called upon the leaders of its affiliated brigades to cut their ties with the brigades and comply with the orders of the Prime Minister, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief.

9. On 21 November, Mr. Al-Abadi announced renewed efforts to tackle corruption. He indicated that the Supreme Council for Combating Corruption was following up on investigations of individuals inside and outside Iraq. The Council, which was established in October 2015 and is chaired by the Prime Minister, met on 4 December to discuss the performance of the General Inspectorate's offices in investigating cases. The following day, Mr. Al-Abadi reaffirmed that countering corruption was a judicial issue and that his Government aimed to achieve justice through due legal diligence.

10. In a related development, on 20 November, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives (the parliament), Salim al-Jubouri, announced that the Council would question ministers, including the Minister of Communications, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Electricity and the Minister of Migration and Displaced Persons, regarding allegations of corruption. On 28 November, the Minister of Communications, Hassan al-Rashid, was questioned.

11. At the local level, several elected officials have been removed from office. On 23 October, the head of the Security Committee of Basrah Provincial Council, Jabbar al-Saadi, was arrested on corruption charges. On 1 November, the Governor of Ninawa, Nawfal al-Akoub, was removed from office in absentia by the Provincial Council over corruption allegations. He was reinstated on 29 November, after the Ninawa Administrative Court annulled the Council's decision. On 21 November, the former Governor of Baghdad and member of the Islamic Da'wah Party, Salah Abdul Razzaq, was excluded from the party owing to corruption allegations.

12. On 31 October, the Council of Ministers issued Decision No. 347, officially setting 15 May 2018 as the date for elections to the Council of Representatives. It indicated that the federal Government would ensure a safe environment for the elections and facilitate the return of displaced persons. On 21 November, Mr. Al-Abadi said that the elections were a constitutional requirement and that no institution had the authority to delay them. He acknowledged the importance of enabling displaced persons to cast their votes and called upon voters to participate in the electoral process. On 22 November, the Independent High Electoral Commission sent a letter to the Speaker of the Council of Representatives requesting that: the elections be held on 12 May 2018, in order to prevent an overlap with the beginning of Ramadan; potential amendments to the electoral law be passed by the Council of Representatives by 20 December; the Council of Ministers authorize holding elections to the provincial and district councils and the Council of Representatives concurrently; and the Commission's budget be approved by 15 December. In response, the Council of Ministers amended its decision on 5 December and set the election date for 12 May 2018. The adoption of amendments to the Law on Elections to the Council of Representatives (Law No. 45 of 2013) and the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections (Law No. 36 of 2008), as well as the draft budget law of 2018 (and therefore the Commission's budget), remains pending.

13. Since the announcement of the election date, several members of the Council of Representatives have voiced concern that the current situation is not conducive to elections. On 4 November, a member of the Iraqi Forces Coalition, Ahmad al-Masari, said that conditions in the liberated areas needed to be improved and the return of displaced persons facilitated before elections were held. On 22 November, the Vice-President, Osama al-Nujaifi, said through social media that the success of the elections would depend on the reconstruction and stability of the liberated areas, the return of displaced persons and the withdrawal of armed groups from those areas. In a televised interview on 9 December, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives expressed support for holding the elections, provided that the environment was conducive to them and the necessary preparations had been completed. On 13 December, the Chair of the Council of Representatives Committee on Migration and Displaced Persons, Raad al-Dahlaki, called upon the Government and the United Nations to focus on ensuring the return of displaced persons, providing them with a safe environment and rebuilding their cities before defining timelines for elections.

14. Deadlines for the registration of political parties and coalitions were set for 25 December 2017 and 7 January 2018, respectively. On 25 November, the National Security Adviser, Faleh al-Fayyad, held a press conference to announce the formation of the Ata' party. Two days later, Mr. Al-Amiri announced his intention to run on an independent list for the elections. On 2 December, a spokesperson for the Sadrist Trend, Salah al-Obaidi, announced that Mr. Al-Sadr would run on a separate list, independently from the Ahrar bloc. On 12 December, the Chair of the State of Law Coalition, Nouri al-Maliki, told the media that the ruling Islamic Da'wah Party would have two separate lists in the elections.

15. The late submission of the draft federal budget law for 2018 to the Council of Representatives by the Council of Ministers on 29 November obliged the Speaker of

the Council of Representatives to call for an extraordinary parliamentary session on 2 December, which, however, was not held as a quorum could not be achieved. The draft has led to controversy among Kurdish members of the Council of Representatives and the Iraqi Forces Coalition over alleged reductions in budget share allocated to the Kurdistan region of Iraq and to the reconstruction of liberated areas, respectively.

16. On 17 December, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, formally requested the Kurdistan Regional Parliament to expedite preparations for the regional parliamentary and presidential elections, to be held within three months. Several parties, including the Movement for Change (Gorran) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, have previously expressed concerns about the process of updating the voter registry. In the meantime, the latter has embarked on internal discussions about its next party congress, following the death of its leader and former President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani.

17. Dire economic conditions in the Kurdistan region of Iraq have led to widespread protests in Sulaymaniyah Governorate. On 19 December, the protests turned violent as demonstrators attacked the offices of political parties and public buildings. Casualties, including deaths, were reported in Raniya and Jamjamal. The leader of the New Generation Movement, Shaswar Abdulwahid, was arrested and his media outlet suspended by the authorities for alleged incitement to violence. On 21 December, Mr. Barzani issued a statement in which he stressed the natural right of the people to demonstrate peacefully but condemned the use of violence.

18. Amid the protests, the Movement for Change and the Kurdistan Islamic Group announced their withdrawal from the Kurdistan Regional Government, citing the need to disband the Cabinet, given the political and economic situation. The Movement for Change also decided to abandon its claim to holding the position of Speaker of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, which it had maintained since October 2015, when the then Speaker, who was affiliated to the Movement, was prevented from entering Erbil.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

19. The federal Government continued to demand the restoration of full federal authority over all disputed areas in and oil exports from the Kurdistan region of Iraq and the country's external border crossings located within the region, including the two international airports in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. In addition, Baghdad continued to insist that the Kurdistan Regional Government should annul the results of the referendum of 25 September as a sign that Erbil abided by the ruling of 20 November of the federal Supreme Court that the referendum was unconstitutional and its results invalid.

20. The Kurdistan Regional Government repeatedly affirmed its respect for the Constitution of Iraq and the ruling of the federal Supreme Court. It insisted, however, that annulling the results of the referendum was beyond its powers, given that they expressed the will of the Kurdish people. The former President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Masoud Barzani, who remains the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, maintained that the referendum was a major achievement for the Kurdish people that could not be undone.

21. Control over the disputed areas and border crossings, including with the Syrian Arab Republic at Fish Khabour and with Turkey at Ibrahim Khalil, remains a source of tension. The positions of the Iraqi security forces and the Peshmerga in the disputed areas remain largely unchanged. No technical negotiations have been held between military officials from the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments since the end

of October 2017, and an uneasy, informal truce has taken effect in place of a formal agreement.

22. Consideration of the draft federal budget law of 2018 has also affected relations between Baghdad and Erbil. On 2 December, the five main political parties in the Kurdistan region of Iraq sent a letter to Mr. Al-Abadi outlining their concerns, including with regard to the planned reductions in the share of revenues allocated to the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the calculation and management of sovereign expenses, the Peshmerga payments and budget allocations in the liberated areas, the region's share of international loans to Iraq and budget allocations to the Halabja local government. Meanwhile, Mr. Al-Abadi reiterated on 5 December that federal funding for the salaries of State employees in the Kurdistan region of Iraq would not be provided until the conclusion of an ongoing audit.

23. In a related development, the federal Supreme Court ruled on 27 November that sitting members of the Council of Representatives enjoyed parliamentary immunity and could be prosecuted only if accused of a felony and only then after their immunity had been lifted by the Council. As a consequence, on 28 November, all 14 Kurdish members, whom the Council had considered referring to the judiciary for their participation in the referendum held in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, resumed their parliamentary functions.

24. On 23 November, the President of Iraq, Fuad Masum, announced the formation of a committee to investigate violations of the Constitution committed since 2005. He travelled to Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Kirkuk from 25 to 29 November in order to promote dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil and make progress on normalizing the situation in Kirkuk. He stressed the importance of reactivating the Kirkuk Provincial Council and electing a new Governor. It has been widely reported that the President sent letters to Mr. Al-Abadi and Mr. Barzani, as well as to international partners, on 18 December, calling upon them to join efforts in uniting the nation and improving relations between Baghdad and Erbil. In Kirkuk, the Provincial Council has not been able to convene since 28 November owing to the absence of a quorum. On 21 November, the Council held its first meeting since federal authority was restored in Kirkuk on 16 October, with 22 out of 41 members participating. The Council rejected calls for its dissolution and agreed to consider a proposal for the dismissal of its acting Chair, Rebwar Talabani. On 28 November, the Council reportedly met only to approve the payment of its members' salaries. The acting Chair remains in Erbil, citing security concerns. The impasse has affected the appointment of a new Governor in Kirkuk and the Deputy Governor, Rakan al-Jubouri, has been acting Governor since 16 October.

C. Security

25. Between 23 and 27 November, Iraqi security forces launched a military offensive in central northern Iraq, focused on clearing remnants of ISIL from the Jazirah desert expanse straddling the Governorates of Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninawa. An area of 14,000 km^2 was cleared and 175 villages in the Jazirah and upper Euphrates areas were liberated. On 26 November, a separate operation began in the Wadi Hawran region in central Anbar, aimed at sealing off escape routes for ISIL from ongoing operations to the north. The conclusion of the larger Anbar military operation was announced on 9 December, although mopping-up operations continue in the north-west of Anbar. The declaration of victory was announced along with the liberation of large swathes of land in western Iraq. Overall, the Iraqi forces have liberated areas in which more than 4.5 million Iraqis live and over 135,200 km^2 of territory. The Government, however, continues to see the possibility of ISIL regrouping and an increase in asymmetric attacks as a major threat to the population.

26. Baghdad continues to experience more improvised explosive device and vehicle bomb attacks perpetrated by ISIL and targeting security forces and civilians than any other centre. A total of 124 attacks with improvised explosives took place between 22 November and 19 December, resulting in the deaths of 60 civilians. On 27 November, a double suicide attack in a market in Nahrawan, east of Baghdad, left more than 20 civilians dead and 30 wounded.

27. On 10 December, two children were reportedly killed and seven other persons injured by a mortar attack on a majority Turkmen area in the Tuz Khurmatu district of Salah al-Din Governorate. On 12 December, mortar attacks in the same area reportedly left 2 persons dead and 20 wounded. According to Kurdish media, the attacks were launched by Sunni and/or Kurdish militant groups operating from the mountainous eastern half of the district. According to the same media, Iraqi military helicopters responded by targeting the villages of Dawudah and Zinzana. On 14 December, other Kurdish media reported the deployment of Peshmerga forces in the area, aimed at closing a security void.

28. The Turkish armed forces reportedly continued strikes against alleged Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) targets. On 28 November, Turkish media reported that the Turkish air force had destroyed 41 PKK targets inside the Kurdistan region of Iraq, killing a number of PKK fighters. According to Kurdish media (Rudaw), the Turkish air force carried out additional air strikes in the Kurdistan region of Iraq on 3 and 11 December. No casualties were reported.

D. Regional and international developments

29. International and regional partners have congratulated the people and Government of Iraq for their victory over ISIL. Key messages were delivered on the need to ensure that the fight against terrorism in Iraq continues and that decisive steps are taken to rebuild liberated areas, strengthen the capacity of Iraqi institutions, promote national reconciliation and prioritize efforts to combat corruption.

30. The Government continued to enhance its cooperation with the international community. On 29 November, Mr. Al-Abadi met the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Theresa May, in Baghdad. He explained that the current focus for Iraq was reconstruction and investment efforts and thanked his counterpart for the support of the United Kingdom in the fight against terrorism. Ms. May reaffirmed support for the unity of Iraq. On 11 and 12 December, Mr. Al-Abadi attended the One Planet Summit on climate change, in Paris, where he stated that, following the defeat of ISIL, Iraq would fight corruption, which endangered stability and hampered development. He also met, separately, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Taro Kono, the President of the World Bank Group, Jim Yong Kim, and myself, and discussed the victory against ISIL, reconstruction and economic reform.

31. On 2 December, Mr. Barzani met Mr. Macron in Paris. Mr. Macron called upon him and Mr. Al-Abadi to initiate a constructive dialogue for Iraqi unity. On 17 December, Mr. Barzani and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Qubad Talabani, travelled to Germany and met the Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who expressed support for the Kurdistan region of Iraq in line with the Constitution.

32. The Government of Iraq continues to strengthen its regional ties. On 10 December, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives visited Bahrain to attend the thirteenth Manama Dialogue Regional Security Summit. On 9 December, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim al-Ja'fari, attended a meeting of the League of Arab States in Cairo to discuss the decision of the Government of the United States

of America to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the relocation of its embassy there from Tel Aviv. On 13 December, Mr. Al-Ja'fari participated in the extraordinary session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Islamic Summit Conference, on Jerusalem, held in Istanbul, Turkey. In his address, he stated that the Government of Iraq considered the decision by the United States to be an act of war that could have a destabilizing effect on the security of the region. He called upon the Government of the United States to reconsider its position. On 18 December, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives attended the extraordinary meeting of the Palestine Committee of the Parliamentary Union of OIC member States, which was hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

33. The Government of Iraq continues to strengthen its economic ties. The Minister of Oil, Jabar al-Lueibi, participated in the meetings on 27 November of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and on 10 December of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries in Kuwait. On 5 and 7 December, an international oil and gas conference was held in Basrah. The conference, which serves as a platform for senior decision makers to discuss technology, solutions and products in the oil and gas industry, was attended by the Minister of Energy of Saudi Arabia, Khalid al-Falih, and representatives of national and international oil companies. Mr. Al-Falih announced the signing of memorandums of understanding between Iraq and Saudi Arabia on oil, gas and other energy projects. On 13 December, Mr. Lueibi stated that he had met the Minister of Energy of Qatar, Mohammed bin Saleh al-Sada, at the meetings in Kuwait, and that they had agreed on investment by Qatar in the gas extraction and refinement and petrochemical sectors.

34. Preparations for an international conference for the reconstruction of Iraq, due to be held from 12 to 14 February 2018 in Kuwait, are well advanced. On 7 December, the Government of Iraq and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, supported by the World Bank, met in Kuwait to brief donors on the preparations for the conference, which will focus on three pillars: the Government's public investment programme, private sector options and social capital, including humanitarian, stabilization and recovery support. My Deputy Special Representative/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator provided an update on the finalization of a new recovery and resilience programme, which will support the Government's national development plan and be launched with the 2018 humanitarian response plan under the social capital pillar of the conference.

III. Update on the activities of the Mission and the United Nations country team

A. Political activities

35. During the reporting period, my Special Representative continued his engagement with government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of political parties, women's groups, civil society and religious and community leaders, congratulating the Government and all Iraqis on their victory over ISIL. He confirmed the unwavering support of UNAMI for the Government of Iraq, guided by the full respect for the Constitution and the law. He underlined the need, in order to safeguard the victory and secure a sustainable peace, particularly in view of the upcoming elections, to take all steps necessary to support the safe, voluntary and dignified return of displaced persons to their homes, provide basic services and security and accelerate the reconstruction of the affected areas. He urged the Government of Iraq to initiate swift legal reforms to ensure that all crimes committed during the conflict were investigated promptly and the perpetrators brought to justice. He confirmed the

support of UNAMI for the Government's reform programme and its efforts to combat corruption.

36. The decision of the federal Supreme Court of 20 November, which ruled the Kurdish referendum unconstitutional and cancelled its results, played a pivotal role in creating the conditions for a constitutional and peaceful way forward to resolve the stalemate between Baghdad and Erbil, as both sides had publicly expressed respect for the decision. My Special Representative continued his engagement with the main stakeholders in Baghdad, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. He urged both sides to start a dialogue on all key matters without further delay, based on and in full accordance with the Constitution, which will also guarantee the full constitutional rights of the Kurdish people.

37. With the provincial council and parliamentary elections of May 2018 fast approaching, my Special Representative is engaging intensively with political and parliamentary leaders, as well as with the Independent High Electoral Commission, to underscore the importance of holding elections in an inclusive, participatory, credible and secure way, as scheduled and required by the Constitution. He has also urged that all necessary steps be taken to ensure that conditions are in place for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their places of origin. This is necessary in order to register them appropriately and allow them to exercise their civil and political rights. He has emphasized that, should displaced persons be unable to return home, it should be made possible for them to exercise their electoral rights in their current location.

38. UNAMI continued its work on national reconciliation. My Special Representative has engaged repeatedly with Iraqi parties and other countries in the region in support of the national settlement project, as a means of ensuring the long-term unity and stability of Iraq, and advocated broader participation in the process. Tribal sheikhs, religious leaders, academics and representatives of political party and civil society from Diyala and Anbar Governorates met twice in November in Baghdad as part of a series of round-table discussions on the theme "National settlement: prospects and challenges", aimed at creating an enabling environment for national reconciliation. A similar round table was held in Najaf in December. Participants at the three events highlighted post-ISIL challenges with regard to the National Settlement Initiative and made recommendations to ensure the success of ongoing reconciliation efforts at the political and societal levels.

39. Women continue to be underrepresented in reconciliation processes at the national level. My Special Representative continues, in discussions with senior political leaders, to actively advocate the effective participation and representation of women in reconciliation and dialogue efforts at all levels. In the context of the global open day on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), UNAMI joined the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in initiating civil society forums and consultative meetings with women leaders in Karbala' and Basrah, with a view to affording them the space to identify challenges that impede their meaningful and effective participation in political and electoral processes and to formulate a strategy to promote their inclusion in such processes.

40. On 23 and 24 October, UNAMI held consultations with political leaders in Baghdad and Erbil. Chaired by my Special Representative, they aimed at broadening the political space for women. Recommendations were put forward, including using constitutional provisions to further increase the representation of women, amending the electoral framework in order to include provisions encouraging political parties to integrate women in elective public positions and addressing barriers faced by women during the electoral process. UNAMI and UN-Women provided capacity-building for 60 women from nine provincial, district and subdistrict councils from the

southern governorates with a view to strengthening their negotiation strategies and enabling them to create platforms within their communities to impart knowledge.

41. My Special Representative continues to facilitate regular meetings between women leaders and political leaders to discuss challenges and generate greater political will for the meaningful and equal participation of women in political, electoral and reconciliation processes. On 4 December, during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, my Special Representative called for the role of women in State institutions, political parties and economic and social life to be expanded and for enhanced and effective protection of their rights. He underlined that the representation of women in leading positions would give them a stronger voice in guiding the work of political parties, the Council of Representatives and the Government. He has also, in discussions with key interlocutors, advocated the full respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of women and girls in Iraq with regard to matrimonial and other matters. He has called upon the Council of Representatives to seize the opportunity for wider consultation on the draft personal status law.

42. On 29 November, my Special Representative met Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani in Najaf. He congratulated the Government of Iraq on the victory over ISIL, emphasizing that it was for all Iraq and the world, and that the fatwa of the *marja'iyah*, under which the popular mobilization forces had been established, had been instrumental in defeating ISIL. He also hailed the Grand Ayatollah's call for the rapid, voluntary and dignified return of displaced persons to their homes, enabling at least a minimum level of reconstruction and delivery of services.

43. A senior UNAMI delegation visited Sulaymaniyah on 21 and 22 December to underline the Mission's deep concern about the violence that accompanied the recent demonstrations in the area and to gain access to first-hand information about developments. The delegation met leaders across the political and social spectrum, including the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Qubad Talabani, the Governor of Sulaymaniyah, Haval Abubakir, political party representatives and civil society activists.

B. Electoral assistance

44. In response to requests from the Council of Representatives and the federal Independent High Electoral Commission, my Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs authorized the deployment of an electoral needs assessment mission to Iraq from 21 to 30 November. The mission met a wide range of Iraqi interlocutors, including national officials, members of the judiciary, representatives of civil society organizations, women advocates and the media, as well as with representatives of the diplomatic community, UNAMI and United Nations country team staff. The team also visited camps for displaced persons, attended a presentation on election technology newly introduced by the Commission and travelled to Erbil. The initial report of the mission, which highlights electoral assistance requirements and priority areas for United Nations support, has been presented to Iraqi interlocutors and is being finalized.

45. In its letter of 22 November to the Council of Representatives, the Commission stressed, among other matters, the need to finalize amendments to the electoral laws by 20 December. It added that, should they not be finalized, it would follow the current norms and operational procedures. On 2 December, on the occasion of an extraordinary session called by its Speaker, the Council completed the second reading of the first proposed amendment to the Law on Elections to the Council of Representatives (Law No. 45 of 2013). The Legal Committee was subsequently given

the task of consolidating the amendments so that the amended law could be submitted for adoption by 20 December. The matter remains pending, given that the Council is in recess until early January 2018. The Speaker also announced that representatives from Kirkuk were holding meetings regarding the Kirkuk-related provisions of the amendments to the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections (Law No. 36 of 2008).

46. Since the decision by the Council of Ministers to hold the elections to the Council of Representatives on 12 May 2018, the Commission has proceeded with operational preparations. According to its database, more than 24 million Iraqis are eligible to vote. The Commission is distributing new voter cards to more than 11 million voters, including 5.7 million women. As at 17 December, the Commission had registered 134 political parties as eligible to take part in the elections. It extended the deadlines for the registration of political parties and political coalitions to 25 December 2017 and 7 January 2018, respectively. UNAMI continued to engage with the newly appointed Board of Commissioners on several areas deemed critical to the conduct of the elections, including on the newly introduced technology for managing election results and on modalities and mechanisms for enabling the inclusive participation of displaced persons in the elections.

47. The Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission suspended preparations for presidential and parliamentary elections in the region following the decision of the regional parliament to postpone them by eight months. The Commission issued a statement in which it urged regional authorities to issue an electoral calendar in order to make the necessary preparations, including for updating the voter registry.

C. Human rights developments and activities

48. Armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence continued to take a heavy toll on civilians. Between 22 November and 16 December, at least 68 civilian men, women and children were killed, and at least 167 wounded, bringing the total number of civilian casualties in Iraq since January 2014 to at least 85,147 (29,972 killed and 55,175 wounded).

49. UNAMI continued to advocate the need for accountability in the context of human rights violations and abuses committed during the ongoing armed conflict, in particular international crimes that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and, possibly, genocide. Following an Iraqi-led process supported by the Mission, a proposed draft law on the creation of a specialized court for international crimes has been delivered by the Mission to Iraqi institutions and other actors for consideration. The Mission also continued to advocate legal reforms and worked on expanding the capacities of the judiciary to address international crimes effectively. It has also been promoting the proper protection of mass graves, with the aim of collecting and preserving evidence.

50. As ISIL continued to lose control of territory, it increasingly targeted civilians and resorted to guerrilla-type actions, causing civilian casualties. On 4 December, five civilians were killed in the Hawijah district of Kirkuk Governorate. On 5 December, in the same district, ISIL gunmen abducted four civilians. Attacks using explosives, either claimed or apparently carried out by ISIL, also occurred in other governorates. On 21 November, in the city of Tuz Khurmatu, Salah al-Din Governorate, a vehicle laden with explosives was detonated in a crowded market, killing 24 civilians and wounding 60 others, including women and children. On 27 November, an attack by gunmen wearing explosive vests in Baghdad, reportedly claimed by ISIL, left at least 11 civilians dead and at least 25 wounded. Explosive remnants reportedly left by ISIL have also caused civilian casualties. On

29 November, an improvised explosive device exploded in a house in Badush subdistrict, Ninawa Governorate, seriously wounding three children. Furthermore, as at 1 December, 1,507 Yazidi women and girls were reportedly still in ISIL captivity.

51. Mass graves continued to be discovered in areas previously controlled by ISIL. On 28 November, police discovered a mass grave in Hit, Anbar Governorate, containing the remains of at least 12 civilians and members of the police killed by ISIL. On 30 November, a mass grave was discovered in Sinjar district, Ninawa Governorate, reportedly containing the remains of 25 Yazidis killed by the group in June 2014. The Mission has recorded the discovery of 108 mass graves in Iraq resulting from the conflict with ISIL since June 2014.

52. Civilians continued to be targeted by unknown gunmen in Mosul district, Ninawa Governorate. On 28 November, unidentified gunmen stormed a store in eastern Mosul, shooting and killing its owner. On the same day, a group of unidentified armed men stormed the house of a widow in western Mosul, killing her and stealing her money. The identity of the perpetrators and the reasons for the killings are not known.

53. Attacks on the families of suspected ISIL members continued, reportedly with the objective of expelling them or preventing them from returning to their homes. On 13 October, the Iraqi security forces reportedly ordered families of suspected ISIL members to leave Hit within 72 hours. Subsequently, between 26 October and 4 November, seven houses were attacked by unknown assailants. An undetermined number of other families whose houses were marked moved out of Hit. Between 8 and 20 November, in three villages on the western side of Sharqat district, Salah al-Din Governorate, unknown assailants using improvised explosive devices blew up at least 20 houses belonging to families of suspected ISIL members.

54. During the reporting period, the Country Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, co-chaired by the Mission and the United Nations Children's Fund, received reports of 24 incidents involving violations against a total of 59 children. Twenty of the incidents, affecting 56 children mostly in Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates, were verified. Ten of them involved killing and maiming, with 14 children confirmed killed and 12 maimed. Moreover, 30 boys were verified to have been recruited and used as fighters. Five incidents of attacks on schools and another four of the use of schools for military purposes were verified. The situation of children in Iraq remains a source of much concern. The Mission continues to discuss with the Government the establishment of an interministerial committee on grave violations of the rights of the child and the provision of support for the reintegration of children formerly associated with ISIL.

55. Incidents of shelling occurred in Tuz Khurmatu, including the Aksu, Jamila and Jamhuri areas, on 9 December, killing one child and wounding 12 civilians, including two women. On 12 December, shelling caused casualties among the popular mobilization forces near the city's police headquarters. The identity of the attackers is unknown. The Mission investigated, including through missions on the ground, allegations of human rights abuses in the city. It observed some 100 shops burned out or damaged along the main market road in Jamhuri. It is likely that additional damage was caused in areas that the Mission was unable to reach. It asked the Iraqi authorities to take all measures necessary to protect civilians in Tuz Khurmatu, facilitate the safe, dignified and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and bring to justice those responsible for the violations that had occurred since mid-October.

56. Challenges with regard to the collection, analysis and reporting of information on conflict-related sexual violence as a specific category of human rights violation continue to be noted. The Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements Working Group, which was set up in August 2017, is focusing on ensuring that information is

collected, analysed and reported in line with the provisional guidance note on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1960 (2010) on women and peace and security. Risks associated with reporting remain a source of concern for some victims and their families, as well as for those working on those issues.

57. Progress continues towards finalizing an action plan on the implementation of the joint communiqué signed by Iraq and the United Nations on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence. While that is encouraging, there is a need to assess to what extent the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) has been implemented and the challenges that it faces, in order to use that information as a reference for possible challenges to the implementation of the draft action plan on the joint communiqué. Furthermore, the Government and its partners have underscored the importance, in developing the plan, of recognizing that victims of sexual violence do not constitute a homogenous group, but originate from the country's diverse religious and ethnic communities, including Yazidi, Turkmen Shi'a, Christian and Sunni components. The implementation of the plan will require responses tailored to the needs of those groups, while also working towards ensuring that the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys are taken into account.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

58. Although large-scale military operations against ISIL have concluded, the humanitarian crisis continues, putting millions of Iraqi civilians at risk. At the close of the combat operations, 2.9 million of the nearly 6 million Iraqis displaced since the rise of ISIL are still outside their homes. Some 86 camps for displaced persons, including 19 near Mosul, continue to be supported by humanitarian partners. During the final stages of the military operations against ISIL in western Anbar, 16,500 people were displaced to camps in Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninawa Governorates. The Ministry of Migration and Displaced Persons and humanitarian partners delivered food, emergency kits, mobile health services and other forms of assistance to more than 30,000 people, including in the recently retaken city of Rawah, Anbar Governorate.

59. The military realignment in disputed areas has had an adverse impact on humanitarian access. Several checkpoints and crossings have been closed to humanitarian partners for months, limiting access to more than 550,000 civilians in northern Ninawa and Kirkuk Governorates. Civilians continue to be killed when returning to booby-trapped houses. The Mine Action Service is responding by prioritizing risk education and accelerating the survey and clearance of improvised explosive devices in newly liberated areas, including in the towns of Hawijah and Riyadh, which are heavily contaminated.

60. In early November, the Government announced its intention to facilitate the return of 2.5 million Iraqis prior to the May elections. Following the announcement, 23,000 people were affected by arbitrary evictions in Anbar and Salah al-Din Governorates. In response to advocacy by my Deputy Special Representative/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, the Prime Minister's Office has reconfirmed the Government's commitment to safe, voluntary and dignified returns and instructed local authorities to cease evictions. The introduction of a Kirkuk Governorate reconciliation agreement, signed by officials, community members and religious leaders on 25 November 2017 and intended to protect returnees affiliated to ISIL, is expected to encourage further returns.

61. During the reporting period, the UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization continued to support the repair of public infrastructure, provide grants to small businesses and households headed by women, boost the capacity of local governments

and provide short-term employment through public works schemes in areas directly affected by the conflict with ISIL. More than 1,500 projects are under way or have been completed in 23 liberated towns and districts in the Governorates of Anbar, Ninawa, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk, employing tens of thousands of people to clear rubble, clean streets, beautify neighbourhoods and repair public buildings. Nearly 550 projects are under way in Mosul. In collaboration with UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the Mine Action Service has started clearance work in the old city and is continuing to clear the Shifa' hospital complex in western Mosul, which ISIL used as its headquarters in the area. Teams have removed more than 2,000 explosive hazards, enabling the Ministry of Health to relocate life-saving medical equipment to a functional hospital in eastern Mosul. The Funding Facility is also prioritizing 164 projects in 10 priority Christian towns in the Ninawa plains. On 22 November, my Deputy Special Representative/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator opened the Tikrit teaching hospital, a landmark stabilization project that will benefit more than 250,000 people in Salah al-Din Governorate.

62. UNDP continued to support the Office of the National Security Adviser in the development and implementation of the security sector reform programme approved by the Prime Minister and the National Security Council in July 2017. The programme focuses on seven areas: defence and federal security; intelligence; critical national infrastructure protection; democratic governance and oversight; national security architecture; criminal justice and law enforcement, including civilian and local policing; and national security legislation. During the reporting period, priority tasks and workplans were developed in each of those seven areas. They were due to be submitted to the National Security Adviser for consideration at the end of December. In parallel, UNDP is supporting the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for each of the seven areas, in order to support the Government in tracking the progress of reform.

E. Security and operational issues

63. The United Nations in Iraq continues to deliver its programmes and activities in a complex and changing security environment. Despite significant security challenges, the United Nations and its partners remain actively engaged in humanitarian and development activities, on the basis of programme criticality and in close coordination with the Government.

64. Construction and renovation in the integrated United Nations compound in Baghdad have continued, with 79 new anti-blast, environmentally sensitive accommodation units completed and renovation work on infrastructure, offices and other facilities ongoing. Following travel restrictions on international flights to and from Erbil airport, the Mission has increased the frequency and number of its own flights there as a contingency measure to enable United Nations staff stationed in northern Iraq to fly in and out of Iraq through Baghdad International Airport. As part of its greening initiatives, the Mission has extended its photovoltaic farm project and the installation of hybrid solar systems for its information and communication technology sites.

IV. Observations

65. I congratulate the people and the Government of Iraq on their victory against ISIL and I hope that all Iraqis will be able to live in peace, dignity and prosperity,

with their human rights respected and protected. The military defeat of ISIL opens a new phase for Iraq. The Government's reform programme, including efforts to combat corruption, enjoys the full support of the United Nations. The Government must ensure that the military defeat of ISIL translates into a victory for accountability and an end to impunity.

66. I strongly urge the Government to redouble its efforts to expeditiously create the conditions necessary for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons.

67. Meanwhile, terrorism remains a threat. I reiterate that it is important for the Iraqi authorities to continuously take measures to protect the lives of civilians and their property. The root causes of terrorism will remain intact unless hateful and exclusionary ideology is defeated. I urge the authorities to take all measures necessary to continue the battle against that ideology, notably by eliminating its financial sources and reinforcing counter-narratives that promote tolerance and coexistence. It is of the utmost importance for the authorities to protect all citizens, especially young people, from being influenced by ISIL and other violent and extreme ideologies and to prevent them from joining terrorist organizations.

68. I reiterate the importance of continuing to advance the security sector reform strategy. All security forces should be placed under the control of the Government. A failure to enforce that principle could lead to renewed instability in post-ISIL Iraq, especially in the liberated areas and the disputed areas. The United Nations stands ready to provide support in that regard.

69. With a view to promoting stability in Iraq, I appeal to countries in the region to work with the Government, building on mutual interests, to pursue the deepening of political and economic ties to promote employment and a comprehensive development programme. With the victory against ISIL, Iraq should now focus on reconstruction.

70. I urge the international community to remain generous in their support to Iraq, including at the upcoming international conference for the reconstruction of Iraq, to be held in Kuwait in February. Having achieved a historic victory against ISIL, continued support in the humanitarian, stabilization, explosive hazard mitigation and development areas, in addition to support for reconstruction and economic stimulus, will be critical in responding to some underlying issues that contributed to the rise of ISIL in the country. Those issues will need to be addressed in order to solidify military gains, reduce the threat of insurgency and achieve durable stability and security for the people of Iraq.

71. With regard to relations between Baghdad and Erbil, I take note of the ruling of 20 November of the federal Supreme Court and call upon the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to initiate a dialogue without further delay so as to address all outstanding issues in line with the Constitution. At the same time, I reiterate that all parties concerned should avoid confrontation, the use of force or the threat thereof and inflammatory statements. Sustainable solutions can be achieved only by pursuing a genuine dialogue. The United Nations remains ready to provide facilitation in that regard, if so requested by the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

72. The Council of Ministers has set the election date for 12 May 2018, in accordance with constitutional and legal timelines. It is of crucial importance that all efforts be made to enable the conduct of the elections in a conducive, credible and inclusive environment in which all Iraqis, men and women, from all governorates, are given the opportunity to participate and for their votes to be duly counted. I welcome the commitment by the Council of Ministers to ensuring a safe environment in which